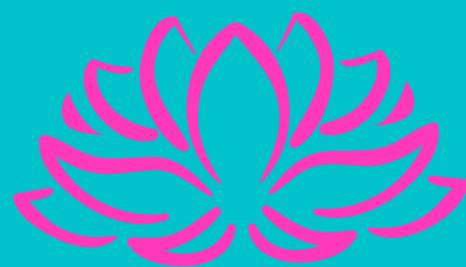


Brahmaviharas for Everyone



Developing a Beautiful Mind
through Loving-Kindness Meditation

Ven. Khanti Khema

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PREFACE

The objective of the Brahmavihara meditation practice, is to help us cultivate more wholesome mind-states, instead of unwholesome ones. The meditation gradually changes a person's behavior from reacting to life events to responding. This leads to a calmer and happier life. Wholesome mind-states have thoughts of non-ill-will (Loving-Kindness), non-cruelty (Compassion) and allows mind to watch the truly impersonal nature of everything without tension and tightness.

Brahmaviharas lead to three significant benefits for us: Firstly, at every stage of meditation practice, we teach mind to systematically abandon thoughts of ill-will, cruelty, discontent, and aversion. We don't even realize these are fading away. Secondly, this practice is not for sitting purpose alone. If we take it into life and use it in all interactions, our brain learns to build new neural responses, wherein it relaxes and responds with compassion and balance even amidst stressful situations. Thirdly, a newfound joy can be cultivated in keeping this practice going as we keep spreading Loving-Kindness to others, which is much needed in the current times we live in. So, this is an act of generosity to oneself and others.



Preparing your brain for practicing meditation and having a smooth ride...

Try living day-to-day by following these simple guidelines that will keep peace in your mind towards all people and help you feel good in Mind, Body and Heart.

1. Not to kill or harm any living beings on purpose;
2. Not to take something that is not freely given;
3. Not to get involved in unhealthy sexual activities that cause mental and physical pain as well as suffering to others;
4. Not to tell lies, use harsh language, gossip, or use slander that causes suffering;
5. Not to take recreational drugs or alcohol that weakens mind and leads to breaking the other advice.

Keeping these guidelines will allow your heart to open and feel much better. This is a very good support for a peaceful meditation to take place. May you arrive at a clear mind, with many smiles to give away to others in your life.

Blessings to all,
Ven. Khanti Khema

WHY PRACTICE THE LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION?

There once was a young man learning to do meditation. His father was a great meditator. One day, he came to see how his son was practicing. The son began by practicing the Breathing Meditation. This was a common practice at the time and his father knew that. He asked his son to practice Loving-Kindness before practicing any other meditation routinely. The boy wondered why? The father explained that by cultivating the Four Heavenly Abodes i.e., - Loving-Kindness, Compassion, Empathetic Joy, and Equanimity – human beings can overcome four major impurities in their minds. When these imperfections fall away from a human being's personality, they can have a smoother meditation, no matter what kind of practice they may take up. This advice is as relevant today as it was many years ago. Here is how it works:

By sincerely practicing Loving-Kindness Meditation, your mind learns to abandon thoughts of ill-will towards anyone. It happens on its own, without you having to fight these thoughts constantly. As Loving-Kindness develops, it turns into a softer feeling of Compassion. By practicing compassion, your mind feels lighter, letting go of old grudges and thoughts of cruelty. Compassion turns into Empathetic Joy, which is a special kind of joy where you feel really happy for someone else's success as though it were your own. As you practice, Empathetic Joy helps your mind abandon all thoughts of discontent. Finally, there comes in Equanimity. It is a special balance of mind in which, no matter what is happening in the present time, you are just fine. There is no hasty reaction or a quickening of heartbeat or breathing, when some incident in life happens that would usually scare or frighten you. Your mind accepts whatever is happening in the present time as it is. When you practice with this fully balanced, undisturbed mind, all thoughts of aversion are abandoned.

A beautiful mind can be developed by this process, which begins with Loving-Kindness and naturally culminates in Equanimity.

It is called the **Brahmaviharas** – the four heavenly abodes of Loving-Kindness, Compassion, Empathetic Joy and Equanimity.



PRACTICE 1: LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

The first step towards cultivating a beautiful mind, is to learn how to send Loving-Kindness to yourself and a chosen Spiritual Friend.

Level 1: Sending Loving-Kindness to Yourself and a Spiritual Friend

Sending Loving-Kindness to Yourself

When you practice Loving-Kindness meditation, you first start by sending loving and kind thoughts to yourself. You remember a time when you were happy. When that happy feeling arises, you **SMILE**. It's a warm glowing feeling in the center of your chest. And it's a radiating feeling that begins to shine from within you.

As soon as that feeling arises, you make a wish for your own happiness by saying a few of these phrases:

'May I be happy'.

'May MY mind be peaceful and calm'.

'May MY mind be filled with joy'.

'May I be cheerful'.

'May MY mind be open and accepting'.



Whatever wish you make for yourself, FEEL that sincere wish. You know what it feels like to be peaceful and calm. Bring that feeling into your heart. Radiate that feeling to yourself. This is a feeling meditation. Whatever wish you make, do it with a **SMILE** and FEEL that wish. You can make the same wish again, as long as it has sincere meaning for you. And you can change the wish occasionally.

Don't make the wish by repeating it over and over again. Saying it over and over again without meaning, is like trying to memorize something. If you do that, you will start thinking about other things. So, just FEEL the wish. **SMILE** into it as you FEEL the peace and calm come up inside you. Keep that feeling going in your heart. If it starts to fade away, then make another wish.

While you're sitting, your mind is going to wander and think about other things. As soon as you notice mind thinking about other things, even if it is in mid-sentence, simply let go of those thoughts. Relax any tension and tightness in your head caused by the thoughts and gently come back to the feeling of Loving-Kindness and making a wish for your own happiness with a **SMILE**.

It doesn't matter if your mind wanders 50 times during a sitting, and 50 times you think **NEVERMIND! LET GO, RELAX, SMILE**, as you **COME BACK!** Each time you let it go, you relax, **SMILE** and come back, **THAT IS A GOOD SITTING!** A bad sitting would be if mind's attention moves away and you are not letting go, not relaxing, or smiling and you start thinking about something else.

When you're sitting, sit with your back nicely straight. Not too tight. Please don't move your body at all. Don't wiggle your toes or fingers. Don't scratch. Don't rub. Don't rock back and forth. And don't change your posture. Sit very still like you are playing a statue game.

While you're sitting, there can be some sensations that arise in your body. You might want to cough, wiggle around, or move your position. As soon as that thought arises, you will start thinking about that sensation: *'I wish it would stop. I really don't like this feeling when it happens. I wish it would just go away.'* But, if you keep thinking about it, that feeling will become bigger and stronger. If you do need to cough, just let that happen and continue on. You just **SMILE** and think **NEVERMIND** as you **LET GO OF ANY THOUGHT** about that feeling and sensation. Then you **RELAX** the tension or tightness in your head (mind), you **SMILE** as you **COME BACK** and **KEEP ON DOING THE MEDITATION**. Keep on relaxing and smiling.



You may notice that there is still a tightness around that sensation in your mind because you really don't like it. You really want it to go away. But the truth is when a sensation arises, it's there! That's the truth. And, it's OK for that sensation to be there. It has to be OK, because it's there! Anytime you try to fight with the truth, anytime you try to control the truth, anytime you try to make the truth be anything other than it is, that's the cause of suffering.

Allow the sensation to be there. Make it OK for it to be there. **NEVERMIND IT!** Let it go. Relax! Gently come back to the feeling of being happy and making a wish for your own happiness. While you're doing this meditation, remember, this IS smiling meditation. You want to put a **SMILE** in your mind AND even though your eyes are closed, put a little **SMILE** in your eyes. Put a **SMILE** on your lips, a little one, and a **SMILE** in your heart. Whenever you notice that you're not smiling, start again.

Sending Loving-Kindness to a Spiritual Friend

A spiritual friend is someone of the same sex, who must be alive and not ill or injured at the time you begin this practice. They cannot be a family member. It works best when they are someone you like a lot for their good qualities. When you think of them, you should be able to feel love and respect for them. ***Be careful not to choose anyone who might make lust arise for you. Lust will prevent the practice from making any progress.*** Once you choose this friend, do not change them until your meditation develops. This friend is only your first objective.

Begin by making a wish for your friend's happiness:

‘May YOU be happy.’

‘May YOUR mind be peaceful and calm’.

‘May YOUR mind be filled with joy’.

‘May YOU be cheerful’.

‘May YOUR mind be open and accepting’.



Whatever wish you want to make for your friend, **FEELING THAT WISH IS VERY IMPORTANT**. Take your friend and put them right in the middle of your heart and **SMILE**. Give them a great big heart hug. **FEEL** that wish. Wish your friend well. Take a real interest in your friend. Really like them and want them to be happy too. If the feeling slips a little, **SMILE** more and go back to sending Loving-Kindness to yourself to build it up again. Then come back to your friend and keep it going with a **SMILE**.

From the beginning of the practice, the question always comes up about why you cannot use other kinds of people as your spiritual friend. This is because using the spiritual friend to send your wish of Loving-Kindness, is a form of brain training to wake up a sleeping power that has always been within you. You have to first cultivate the seed to help it grow stronger. So, by working with one person first, whom you have good feelings towards, your mind will not get pulled off course. As you keep your practice going all the time, what will happen is that you will begin to either see your spiritual friend **SMILE** back at you in your mind, OR you will experience a fairly strong feeling that he/she is feeling very happy just as you do while practicing.

Progress Signs for Beginner's Meditation

There are a few signs that come up while you are sending Loving-Kindness to yourself and your spiritual friend that indicate progress in your meditation.

When these signs appear, it is time to allow Loving-Kindness to move from the heart area up into your head. This is where you will begin to work in the next level of your meditation.

The signs you're looking for, are:

1. The feeling of Loving-Kindness moving upwards across the chest towards your head! DO NOT STOP IT! Allow it to go where it wants.
2. You see in your mind that the spiritual friend is happy and is '*smiling back at you*'. This can be a personal feeling that the other person is feeling happy too. Some might see the person. Others just know it is true!
3. You begin to notice that you are losing some feeling in your body in the areas of your hands, arms, or legs, like you are beginning to disappear. (**Note:** This is NOT numbness. Numbness begins to itch when it begins to fade. This doesn't do that. This is normal and simply means that you are beginning to let go of a LOT of tension in your body.)
4. You experience feeling lighter in your head, like the head is feeling full or it seems like things are moving away from you when you close your eyes.
5. The texture of Loving-Kindness changes to a softer feeling, like a cotton ball, when it moves up into the head. This just means Compassion is waking up.

If one or more of these above symptoms happen, it's time to move to the next level of your practice.



SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

Once the feeling of Loving-Kindness moves up into the head, you are now an advanced meditator, and you are asked to practice the *Breaking Down the Barriers exercise*. This should not take more than one sitting; about 1 hour long.

Level 2: Breaking Down the Barriers By Using Other People

You should do this entire exercise in 1-2 sittings. But do not spend more than an hour on it. By this point, you should feel confident to keep using Loving-Kindness in daily life interactions. The more it is used, the stronger its power grows.

Now you are going to send Loving-Kindness to some other kinds of people to expand your field of Loving-Kindness. This test is to see how well your brain has learned to respond to your mental intention. You don't have to verbalize the wish anymore. You can just think the wish and **SMILE** to them.

- First, you run the same practice you did with your Spiritual Friend by choosing **3 more Spiritual Friends** of the same type. These friends can now belong to any gender. They still must be alive. They still cannot be a family member. They must not be ill or injured. They must be someone you respect and really like. Your objective is to send the same kind of wish to these friends, **ONE AT A TIME**, until each of them smiles back at you.

When the first one smiles, you then send them home and move on to the next person. This time, you do not need to begin by sending Loving-Kindness to yourself. Begin by sending the wish to each friend, as you work on them one at a time. Wish in your heart for each of them to be happy, calm, and clear in their mind. Keep doing this until you feel inside that they are happy or see them **SMILE** back in the same way as you did the first one. As soon as this happens, move onto the next one in line. After you complete these three, you then go to Step 2.

- Second, you select **4 family members** from either gender. They must be alive and not ill or injured. Work on them the same way, sending Loving-Kindness to them one by one. As soon as they **SMILE** back, let them go too.
- Third, you choose **4 neutral people**. These should be a casual acquaintance like a cashier, librarian, gas station attendant, bank teller, mailman, or anyone who is not known to you directly but you occasionally come across in life. They are not close friends or someone whom you meet at work every day. Send Loving-Kindness to each of them and when they **SMILE** back at you, let go and move forward.
- The last step is a little harder. This time you are to select at least **4 difficult people** (whom you have a turbulent relationship with). You can work through as many who come up, if you wish, but not less than four. A difficult person is someone who causes tension and stress when you think of them. These are people you do not like very much for whatever reason. While you work through this kind of a person, you are going to let go of how you feel about them. This part might be tough. You work on them one by one until you see them **SMILE** back at you or you truly feel neutral about them. Because these are harder, you might get stuck. You might have a thought like,



"UGH! I don't really want to send any Loving-Kindness to this person! No way!" So, here is what you do. You step back to one of the neutral persons from Step 3, to get the feeling of Loving-Kindness going stronger again. Once you regain your balance, come back to the difficult person again. Now, keep the Loving-Kindness going until they **SMILE** back at you. You might have to go back a couple of times or more to do this if it's a stronger enemy. You keep this going until they **SMILE** or until you get a clear feeling that they are feeling lighter about this too. This exercise is about clearing away any old grudges or wounds inside us. That's good! Keep going.

Level 3: Radiating Loving-Kindness to All Beings in Six Directions



Now that you have finished *Breaking Down the Barriers*, you will carefully start to radiate Loving-Kindness outward, one direction at a time. This is a gradual practice that builds up stronger communication with the mind. Eventually it becomes like a candle radiating light into all six directions. Your object of meditation is to send Loving-Kindness to all beings in one direction at a time until your mind has grown strong enough to send it to all directions at once.

- You radiate Loving-Kindness to all living beings from your head in the ***direction ahead of you*** for 5 minutes as if that direction goes on forever! You pretend that the light of Loving-Kindness is shining out of your entire being in that direction like a candle lights up a dark room. You can gently **SMILE** as you tip your head slightly back as if you were enjoying the warmth of the sun upon your face. Your intention is enough, no need to verbalize your wish or push the feeling in the direction. Just let the Loving-Kindness feeling emanate from inside your head like your head is the wick of a candle shining light through the darkness.
- After 5 minutes you can radiate Loving-Kindness to all living beings in the ***direction behind you*** for 5 minutes in the same way.
- Then you radiate Loving-Kindness to all living beings in the ***direction to the right of you*** for 5 minutes.
- Then you radiate Loving-Kindness to all living beings in the ***direction to the left of you*** for 5 minutes.
- Then you radiate Loving-Kindness to all living beings ***down into the earth*** for 5 minutes.
- And lastly, you radiate Loving-Kindness to all living beings ***up into the heavens*** for 5 minutes.

- Finally, you radiate Loving-Kindness to all living beings in ***all six directions*** for as long as you can and keep on smiling for the rest of your sitting. **AND WHILE WALKING, YOU SEND TO ALL BEINGS IN ALL DIRECTIONS.**

NOTE: While practicing at this level, keep smiling at all times. It is OK for you to imagine that other beings are receiving this in the universe. Do not analyze anything in your mind while doing this. Instead, just “BE” the Loving-Kindness, be the light, and keep smiling. You must complete the exercise to this point for TWO full sittings for as long as you can keep them going.

Try to practice without a clock, at least once a week, by now. When you do break your sitting, get up slowly and keep on smiling while maintaining the feeling you have achieved. As you begin to walk, you keep sending Loving-Kindness to all six directions. Then move into your day and **SMILE** into any task you do with a lighter, sharper mindfulness.

Progress Signs for Advanced Meditation



- As you radiate Loving-Kindness to all six directions, you feel it going outward. It can be subtle or strong, like a golden light. No need to make it stronger, if it is weak. Continue radiating whatever is there. When mind begins to wander, immediately say, **NEVERMIND! Let Go, Relax, SMILE and Come Back** to sending Loving-Kindness again.

- As you feel more settled, this feeling of Loving-Kindness will change into a quieter feeling of Compassion. Mind feels like it is expanding in all directions. It can be strong for some or just “*big and expansive*” for others.
- Next, this expansion contracts back in and the feeling in mind changes to Empathetic Joy. You may see a flickering at one of the sense bases or consciousness arising and passing away like frames in a movie. Some might feel something at a different sense base, like a tiny tapping on the cheek, or a tone repeating in the ear. You may also start to experience strong insights into impermanence and the impersonal nature of everything.



- If you do see the little lights, you may watch underneath where the light arises to see what happens before it comes up, as your new object of meditation. There is a strong balance of mind that now arises. The strength of this Equanimity depends on your curiosity and interest. The feeling of Empathetic Joy arises and then changes into a quiet balance of mind. There isn't much activity or mind-objects to notice. Only a stable and balanced feeling. Now, you can use this Equanimity as your object of meditation and radiate it to all six directions.



- You will then experience a level where there seems to be *nothing*. All thoughts have stopped. Mind is quite still. You don't notice your body at all now and you begin to realize you are truly in a deep, mental realm.
- There can be lights that arise. **NEVERMIND, LET GO, RELAX, SMILE** and **COME BACK** to observing a calm mind with Equanimity. Your mind will become bright and clear. You can sit longer now—up to 2 hours. If the sitting is going well then just keep sitting! If you get up now, be sure you open your eyes gently and get up very slowly before you begin walking. When you sit again, you will need to build up your mindfulness once more in order to get back to where you were, in the previous sitting. Take advantage of your progress and go deeper now, not later.
- **ALWAYS WALK IN BETWEEN SITTINGS.** This is very important to get your heart pumping. If you were very deep in your sitting, you should walk at a regular walking speed. DO NOT walk very slow. That form of walking is not for this kind of practice. Sitting can slow down your energy. As you walk you should radiate Equanimity to all directions at the same time. Become a bubble of balanced energy moving forward radiating equanimity.
- After some time in this state, where there is nothing, when conditions are right, your mind will fall into what seems like a dream-state. But you won't be sure when you come out, if you were asleep or awake. It might feel confusing. It is at first difficult to remember what happened. The instructions are to sit still for a minute or so and then get up slowly to walk. The mind will now be more still than ever before. When you do get up to walk a bit, ask your mind, "*What happened?*" As you walk, a color or pattern may pop up in the mind. Immediately let go of anything you recall. This is emptying out your mind so you don't think about any of it.



- When you come back to sit again, now, we instruct you to sit in this Quiet Mind with Equanimity for up to 2-3 hours. By now you realize time is an illusion. At the end of a sitting, it may feel like only a few minutes have passed, but it has been hours. This is normal. This can begin happening earlier in the training too. When you begin sitting again, don't push at all. Just sit gently! There probably won't be any more than an occasional vibration that arises. If your attention goes there, just back away and relax. Keep relaxing away everything.
- You may sit with nothing happening at all for an hour or more now. Your mind is completely unmoving, like a rock. It won't shake. If it does, by this time, your mind just lets go and relaxes. All is on automatic now.
- At this stage, the feeling of Equanimity is locked in and there is only 'Quiet Mind'. That is your only object of meditation. You understand that there is no movement, you observe and just (contentedly and dispassionately) be with that. There is now total relief in this unworldly, mental state. Always come back to being with understanding and knowing that you are observing Quiet Mind. If your attention wanders at all, from this present moment of peace and non-activity, mind will quickly let go, **SMILE** softly and come back automatically. Enjoy the peace of no activity and relax.
- Finally, when you are completely unconcerned with this state anymore, the mind, all of a sudden, just STOPS! Everything turns OFF. And there is nothing but darkness. This is NOT the same as a space before another level. It is a turning off. In fact, it feels as though you are coming back from somewhere. It is like the power was turned off in the entire house and all you know now, is that it is coming back on again.
- If you are aware enough, you will experience a quick feeling of *Relief*. This depends on each person, the size of burden that falls off you. That may only last a moment or two. Then, there is an upsurge of an all-pervading joy arising in a powerful way, fresh and new, felt throughout the body. There is a bright clean life energy coming back on. You feel a tremendous sense of relief and are very happy! It feels like a much lighter, newborn brain without any heaviness at all and it is easy to **SMILE**.

You have just experienced *Nibbāna* for the first time! Congratulations!

Always Walk in between Sittings

Walking Meditation is your first step to taking any practice directly into everyday life. As your time gradually increases, it becomes imperative to have a support practice that keeps your blood circulation functioning very well. If you do your walking correctly, you can lengthen your sitting time without hurting yourself physically. Your meditation develops the best when you are learning a skilled observation and comprehension of the teaching in a parallel way; a simultaneous side by side interwoven training. This way full understanding comes together very well.

In the Brahmavihara Meditation, we are learning to communicate with our brain so we can purify and retrain it. This is so our mind will change from habitually choosing unwholesome painful tendencies that cause suffering to choosing wholesome habitual tendencies that bring more tranquility and happiness into our life.

Not only Buddhist Teaching, but modern science as well tells us that the fastest way to purify and change a brain's habits is by repetitious training. ***Repeating the new helpful habit as often as possible in exactly the same way every time, helps the brain learn to respond instead of re-act like it did in the past. Therefore, our training should be repetitious in nature until the brain flips into automatic. It starts to respond on its own properly.***

This is why, while you are doing Loving-Kindness Meditation, your main interest is to keep your spiritual friend with you (in your mind), everywhere you go. Keep them with you when you go to lunch. Keep them with you while in the office or working outside. Keep them with you when you go to bed. Even, keep them with you in the shower—all the time, keep them in your mind. This is the ongoing, deep continuous message you are trying to get to your brain. You are not to go anywhere or do anything without your spiritual friend. The fastest track to learning the Loving-Kindness Meditation is to train it to be in the front of your mind by repeating your practice of Right Effort/ Right Striving every time in the same way.



When practicing Loving-Kindness, you are also building up your practice times gradually. You do this, little by little because longer sittings give you more time for deeper observation of how everything actually works. Retreats in

sequestered spaces help you most because there are fewer interruptions that will happen. But our training is not designed for you to do the practice only on retreats. We are attempting to help you integrate the practice you learn into daily life interactions. This is how real change happens. This is why it is called a **“PRACTICE”**.

This is why WALKING is so important too. It helps you take a break from sitting positions but continue training your mind. The faster significant changes happen in your life, when you keep on using your practice. So, walking gives you a break from your sitting posture positions. ***In meditation, there are two kinds of pain. There is Physical Pain and there is Meditation Pain. It is very important that you use a sitting position that does not cause you discomfort. It's important to know how to identify physical pain which can cause permanent damage for your body or meditation pain which will not cause permanent damage to the body.***

When you reach an end of your sitting meditation, don't quickly get up and begin walking. You need to get up slowly and keep your mind quiet and your observation going; don't stop. You may very briefly stretch a little in place before you begin to walk at a regular pace. **DO NOT WALK SLOWLY.**

A NOTE about PAIN IN MEDITATION: As you first begin to walk, if a pain continues in that part of your body, this means the pain is a physical pain and you need to change your sitting position when you begin sitting again. But if you take the first few steps and the pain disappears, then, you are confirming that this is a meditation pain. This means you are simply burning off some old past karma during your meditation and you may continue to sit through this pain, no matter how awful it is, and when you get to the other side beyond it, your body will be just fine to do this. There is no danger.

To walk correctly, you need to have a 10-meter-long space to walk on level ground outside or inside. You can walk back and forth, or just take a walk depending on your surroundings and situation. The idea is to get your heart pumping well. Now, if there is no walking space, you may go up and down a set of stairs to get the blood flowing well instead.

We recommend walking a ratio of 15 minutes for every hour you sat in meditation. It isn't useful to walk more than 45 minutes max. Any more time doesn't make a difference. You are walking to balance your body and buildup your energy as best as you can. It is not meant as a break from sitting meditation so much as it is a chance to continue meditation while moving in life. This is why walking a normal pace is important. If you do sit longer hours at a stretch in meditation, say 2-3 hours or more, then it is important to follow it up by more vigorous walking or running up and down the stairs.

PRACTICE 2: FORGIVENESS MEDITATION

When you begin sending Loving-Kindness to yourself, sometimes you might encounter a barrier that makes it difficult to bring up the feeling of Loving-Kindness inside you. This can also happen when a meditator is coming to learn this and they have been going through some traumatic change in their life. Such situations might put you in despair and you feel like giving up meditation altogether. But don't lose hope if this is the case. There is a way to help.

At this point, it may be required that your object of meditation be modified in order to help remove any blockages for your heart. At such times, the ideal practice would be a cleansing meditation. Forgiveness Meditation is used for this very purpose. It can take a few days, weeks or even months to work through all these inner barriers to Loving-Kindness completely, but one can relieve the situation enough that a person can continue on with their retreat in only a few days. Do not be sad if this happens. Some of us had to practice forgiveness for years because of how deep we needed to cleanse before we could blossom fully by way of Loving-Kindness.

It is very important to follow these instructions exactly as given here. If anything comes up while doing this meditation that prevents you from practicing forgiveness, you are to just keep relaxing, **SMILE** and come back right away. Your brain simply isn't used to doing active forgiveness in daily life. This is common. So, your mind might resist out of worry. But all it takes is some gentle persuasion, and you'll be able to have an agreement with mind that doing forgiveness will bring great relief.



One thing to keep in mind is that if you 'NEVERMIND' too quickly when something comes up, you might not see that a person is trying to pop up in your mind whom you NEED to forgive in Step 2. It is an important part of Step 2 in this practice to find such people. So, pay close attention to what comes up in mind as you follow along these instructions and only keep on relaxing, smiling and coming back.

Step 1: Forgiving Yourself

Forgiveness is like a cousin to the Loving-Kindness practice. It clears away obstacles that prevent smooth progress in our meditation. It is also a generosity practice that opens our heart, both towards ourselves and others. Select ONE

phrase that you feel applies to you and say it to yourself. The first two phrases are usually the most successful for most people. Once you get started with this, you can also create your own phrases. But you must run them by someone to make sure that they do not have any negative weight that is being inflicted upon you. They must support a positive, forward progression. You would never say something like, "*I forgive MYSELF for being the slowest thinker in my family!*", for instance. That would not be any good. We tested many phrases and listed the top four for you below:

‘I forgive MYSELF for not understanding.’

‘I forgive MYSELF for causing myself and others suffering.’

‘I forgive MYSELF for breaking a precept.’

‘I forgive MYSELF for never allowing myself to just be.’

You begin by using one single phrase for this meditation, until no one else comes up when you say it anymore. Give your phrase a chance to sink into mind when you say it. Don't just keep on repeating it. The phrase should help bring up a feeling by recalling a memory. Please be patient with yourself as you begin this practice. No need to rush through it. When you free yourself from the weight of an old event with some person, and you feel like they forgive you too, you then return to your phrase and repeat the process until no further people pop up. You then may continue with a second phrase to see what happens. Once no one else comes up, you then return to the Loving-Kindness Meditation and try again to see if there are any more blockages. If you did your work properly here, then your Loving-Kindness practice will run smoother than before and you can continue developing it.



Say the phrase sincerely, re-affirm it, then relax, **SMILE**, and let it sink in. Watch for any person popping up.

“I forgive myself for not understanding. I really do forgive myself.”

SMILE into the point of **NOT UNDERSTANDING**. At some time in the past, we have all re-acted without understanding what was really going on at the time. Later on, we felt guilty about it and a small scar was left inside. Just radiate forgiveness '*into that point*'. Keep smiling as you do this. Say it again. This is how **YOU** forgive yourself. When some memory comes up, you find that person, and you forgive yourself again.



Someone else is bound to pop up into your mind while you are forgiving yourself. You are to welcome them. Always allow them to come up. This is important to REMEMBER! When someone pops up, don't chase them away as if they are a usual kind of distraction. This practice is different because you are only to practice the steps - **LET GO**, **RELAX**, and **SMILE**. There will be times when some thought comes up that is trying to stop you from practicing forgiveness! That might happen because mind is not familiar with what you are doing when you begin forgiving. It has to get used to you doing forgiveness and begin to trust that it is OK for you to do this. Once mind accepts that it is safe to do this practice, it will start working smoothly.

Step 2: Forgiving Another Person

When a memory of another person comes up, you should immediately picture that person in your mind. Now you have the chance to GIVE forgiveness to another person. Bring that person up as clearly as you can in front of you and look them in the eye and very sincerely say to them the same phrase you just said to yourself: *"I forgive you for not understanding!"* See them if you can or sense they are with you there. Look sincerely at them through your mind's eye, and say to them, again, *"I really do forgive you"*, while you radiate forgiveness to them. Forgive them for whatever they personally did. This is sincerely forgiving another person. Forgiving others opens the way for us to forgive ourselves more easily in the future, so we don't hold things inside. It is not finished until you can relax and sincerely mean it when you say it. This takes time, so be patient and persistent.

Step 3: Receiving Forgiveness from the Other Person

In this third step, it is important NOT to ask the other person to forgive you. When they forgive you, that is an act of their generosity and you should accept this when it happens and **SMILE** into it. Just let this unfold by itself in a natural way. Many times, this other person will look directly back at you in your mind's eye and **SMILE** at you or forgive you too! Sometimes, people experience an overwhelming sense of relief after practicing forgiveness towards another person, as though a heavy weight has been lifted off their shoulders.

This is very refreshing. This is the feeling of forgiveness. If you experience such a moment, keep smiling and send some Loving-Kindness back to them. As they forgive you, this relief washes over you. This is the feeling of forgiveness meditation. All of this is in your mind's eye but very heartfelt too. Keep accepting forgiveness with a **SMILE**. This program completes itself.



The practice is a complete circle of pure Generosity. You began by giving forgiveness to yourself. Next, you gave forgiveness to another human being. Finally, you accepted forgiveness when someone else gave it to you. That is the complete circle of generosity and forgiveness.

Don't forget! When you practice this way, keep on smiling into your phrases, one by one. It supports a brighter mind and sharper awareness. Be patient. Give your phrase time to sink into mind. Once people stop coming up, a phrase is used up. There is no set time for completing this practice. Each person is different.

Now It's Time to Walk in the Forgiveness Meditation

Walking Meditation within the Forgiveness Meditation training is also an opportunity to take Forgiveness directly into everyday life. When practicing Forgiveness, it isn't as necessary to sit through longer sessions. 1-hour sessions seem to work very well and you can do a few of them during your day's schedule when they are this length. Or whenever you accept Forgiveness from another person in the Step 3 of Forgiveness Meditation, it's time to take a smiling break and go for a walk. You will come back fresh to continue by saying the same phrase again and allowing mind to open far enough for another person to come up.

When practicing Forgiveness, it is true that you need to keep your blood circulation functioning well just like in the Loving-Kindness practice. This time though, if you do your walking correctly, you will be training your mind to always remember to FORGIVE in every situation of life. ***You are training Mind to first and foremost FORGIVE, secondly, allow a little listening space which is part of being Compassionate, and then, put some Loving-Kindness into whatever is going on by giving a careful considerate response.***

In Forgiveness practice also, we are learning to communicate with our brain. We are learning how to purify and retrain the brain. Before this training, we may have been locking negative feelings inside of us. We don't have to force

these old tendencies to stop. We only need to stop giving attention to the older tendencies and replace them with more positive intention.

We are teaching Mind to follow our intentions and any precise determinations we set up concerning FORGIVENESS. Mind will change from habitually choosing unwholesome painful tendencies of thinking about past actions that cause suffering, to choosing wholesome habitual tendencies that bring more tranquility and happiness into our life in the present time. Forgiving is a good substitution for our mind. The strongest feeling one feels occurring during the Forgiveness practice is RELIEF.

Not only Buddhist Teaching, but modern science as well tells us the fastest way to purify and change a brain's habits is through a repetitious form of training. We are interested in replacing any internal restlessness, guilt, or remorse hidden deeply in us with FORGIVENESS. Therefore, our training should be repetitious in nature until the brain flips into automatic and forgives before doing anything else. Forgiving also brightens our mind and sharpens our awareness.

This is why, while you are doing the FORGIVENESS meditation your main interest is to keep impressing upon the brain through a continuous message, the importance of FORGIVENESS. That is the directive for this practice. No matter what happens, no matter where you are when you are not in meditation, no matter what you hear or see, you must practice forgiving first in the situation. There is no hot water? Forgive it. The windows were open when it rained? Forgive it. The electricity went off when you needed the computer? FORGIVE IT... LET IT GO! FORGIVE. FORGIVE. **FORGIVE, RELAX, SMILE** at everything when outside of a Forgiveness session.

Therefore, it makes perfect sense that your practice continues while you are walking, so, you use that time to impress upon your mind to forgive and accept life. Keep this in mind if you are serious about following the entire Forgiveness program. You are not to go anywhere or do anything without Forgiveness in your mind. The fastest track to Forgiveness is to train Mind to keep forgiving all the time. This is why we use walking to emphasize it too.



To walk correctly, you need to have a 10-meter-long space to walk on level ground outside or inside. You may walk back and forth, or just take a walk depending on your surroundings and situation. The idea is to get your heart pumping well. If there is no walking space, you may go up and down a flight of stairs to get the blood flowing well instead. But now as you are moving you will also say something every time you put a foot on the ground. It goes like this:

***I-FORGIVE-YOU-AND-YOU-FORGIVE-ME.
I-FORGIVE-YOU-AND-YOU-FORGIVE-ME.***

And so on...



You walk a ratio of 15 minutes for every hour, just like in a Loving-Kindness meditation. A short walk after lunch helps a great deal if you are at work, or a 15 minute period of movement around the house.

Just remember to keep on drumming into your mind the message of “***I-FORGIVE-YOU-AND-YOU-FORGIVE-ME.***” Trust me. Mind is listening to this. It’s learning.

You are walking to balance your body and buildup your energy as best as you can. It is not meant only as a break from sitting meditation so much as it is a chance to continue meditation while moving in life. This is why walking at a normal pace is important. If you do sit longer hours at a stretch in Forgiveness Meditation, say 2-3 hours or more because you are working very hard on one particular person, then it is important to follow it up by more vigorous walking or running up and down the stairs in the same way we talked about in the Loving-Kindness Meditation.

Forgiveness Meditation was used by many students as their primary meditation of choice for extended periods of time in life because it helped so much to lighten the heart and brighten their life. It gradually removed the pain of old wounds.

This is an exceptional tool to keep in Life’s Little Toolbox. And also, you can use this practice as much as you need to cleanse obstructions that block any form of meditation so that you can continue your cultivation path. Now you know what to do whenever you need to use it in the future.

MANAGING DISTRACTIONS DURING MEDITATION

When a person first begins meditating, mind might not want to stay still. It might be like a monkey jumping around a tree. That's monkey mind! Learning what to do with a monkey mind brings less pain and frustration to your meditation. There is a right way and a wrong way of managing distractions. Always remember that these distractions are your teachers. It is very important not to struggle or fight with them. Just learn how they operate and then leave them alone. Do not spend time trying to chase them away. They need to be free to arise so that you can understand what craving feels like when the tension and tightness begins to increase. You will learn where your own craving is coming from and how it works. When you witness this, you discover how the heat of craving is ignited. You need to understand how distractions come up, how they are dangerous, and how they disappear. They should be treated impersonally as guests in your house (the mind) for that reason! But don't leave your object of meditation and get into any conversations with them. Just allow them to hangout and leave on their own. Once a distraction understands that you are not going to feed it your personal attention, it will gradually stop coming to visit you anymore.



Whenever you grab onto a distraction, tension arises and you can notice how tension slightly grips your head. Your smile might droop a little or your facial muscles tighten.

This is **CRAVING** (personally wanting something). Notice how it has tension in it. Craving clouds your mind and **CLINGING** (holding onto what came up in mind) grows it bigger and makes it worse as we start thinking about it. That is called '*mental proliferation*'. When these distractions show up, you have the opportunity to see HOW Impermanence, Suffering, and Impersonal nature of all processes work in all of this. Don't miss it.

- **Doubt arises:** When doubt arises, your collectedness and observation fall away. Your ability to bring up the feeling and send out your wish of Loving-Kindness and your radiance falls away. When there is doubt, you cannot stay with your object of meditation, and you fall off it.
- **Inattention arises:** Inattention means that you move your attention off your object of meditation. This is another kind of distraction. This is caused by a lack of interest in your spiritual friend or your current object of meditation. Pick up your interest and remember that Loving-Kindness doesn't get stronger unless you sincerely mean it.



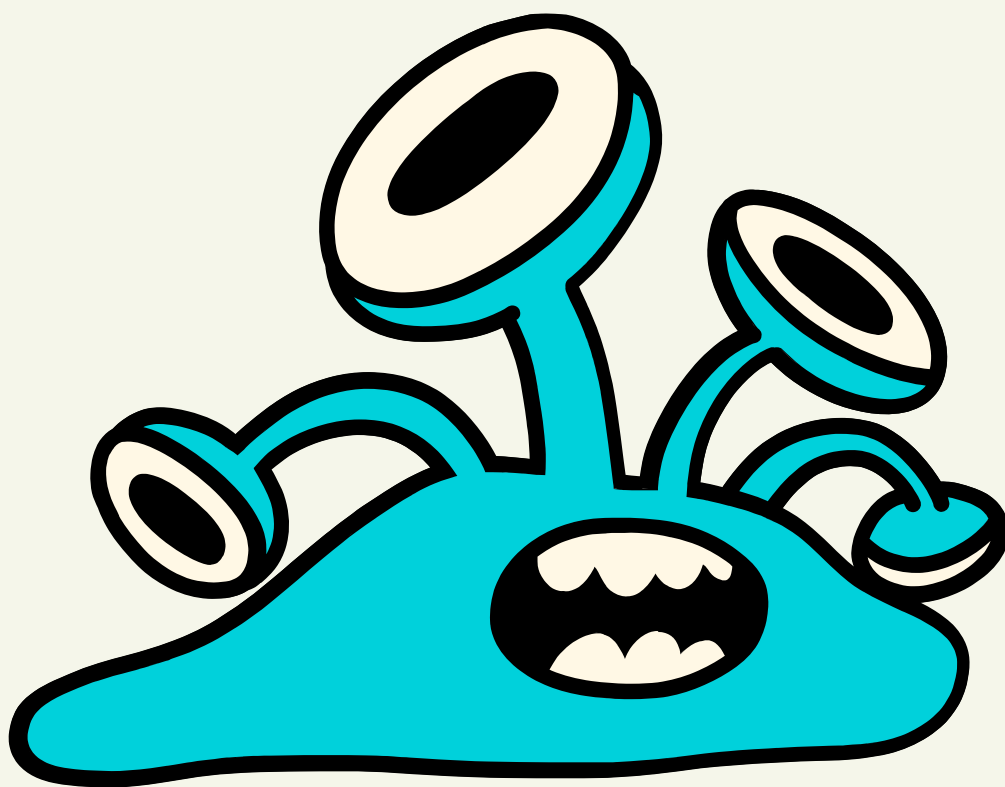
- **Sloth and Torpor arises:** Here, your collectedness falls away. This can happen if you lean back into your chair. If you are sitting on the floor, your posture can begin to move into a slump. Your head might start bobbing forward as your energy goes down. If you are in a chair, you need to roll up a towel and place it behind the bottom of your back to help you not sink back into the chair. You need a bit more interest and energy if this happens. The more interest you take in your spiritual friend or your current object of meditation, the less often this will happen. When you walk, move at a normal pace to keep your circulation going. This is very important.
- **Fear arises:** See fear for what it is! Very often it is an assumption you make in your mind and project into the future. *'What you think and ponder on becomes the inclination of your mind.'* Let go of assumptions and stay in the present time with your spiritual friend or your current object of meditation. You are safe here. Relax the tightness in your mind and body and keep going with a gentle **SMILE**. Go one step at a time.
- **Elation arises:** This is 'excitement'. Have you ever been caught in laughter? That is elation. Be careful not to let it catch you during a meditation. On the other side of this elation when it passes away, you will feel good. But, let that go also and come back to a more stable impersonal observation and keep your meditation going.
- **Inertia arises:** This is when you are working very hard for a number of days on your meditation practice. Then, suddenly, *'you get stale!'* The solution here is to LITERALLY take a day off and PLAY! Yes. That's right. I said, Just PLAY! Go to the river and put your feet into the cool water, or take a walk on a forest path and reground yourself. You can go to the ocean if it is nearby and have a swim. Your job is to just keep smiling all day. If any negative thoughts arise, you are to LAUGH out loud! Then you return to your meditation and continue on with a **SMILE**. This can bring about miraculous results, plus progress on your path.
- **Excess of energy arises:** You can reach a place where there is too much energy and this takes you out of balance with your mindfulness and observation. Restlessness is when you can't stop moving your body one way or another. You sometimes grab onto it and feed it, to keep it going. Gently tell yourself, *"Hey! It's time to let go and see this for what it is."* Re-adjust yourself and start again.





- **Deficiency of energy arises:** When a deficiency of energy happens, you are tested to rebalance your energy into what you are doing. Don't let it fall away. But also, don't raise it up too much. Get it into a level of support for your practice. You can do it. Also, in the case of longer retreats, sometimes you begin to get exhausted and it might be time to stop for one day, go somewhere to play and return the next day to begin again. A teacher might suggest this in some instances. When you return, the meditation will feel fresher and it might fall right into place.

- **Longing arises:** This is when desire arises just underneath what you are doing. It is not obvious but it is there. Sometimes when you are in retreat, you begin to long to reach *Nibbāna*, the need pops up to get there by the end of the retreat! This is because of desire. When this happens, you cannot reach your goal. This is because YOU are still there. YOU need to get out of the way for progress to happen as you get closer to your goal.
- **Perception of diversity arises:** This is about when you begin to THINK about the similarities of what is coming up and expanding your thinking into more complex concepts. You might slip into questioning. Why not let them come up? Although there might be many thoughts coming up, you CAN begin to notice how they come up in a similar way each time. One subject rolls over into another and so on, leading to a form of mental proliferation that takes over mind. As mind wanders away from your observation, you begin to forget what you are supposed to be doing and start moving around on your cushion. Best to let it go. Abandon it. Step back to the instructions, re-listen to them, start again, and let go of all analysis.



- **Excessive meditation upon forms arise:**

This is a trap that YOU can get caught in that becomes a real hindrance in itself. Sometimes we get attached to arising phenomena. We start putting too much attention on it, making it more complicated than is needed. This is demonstrated when we insist on adding ingredients to the basic instructions. This makes the practice more

complicated and messes up the results. The solution is to back up and listen to the instructions again. Don't add or take away anything. Just do it by following the instructions. You just need to re-tune your practice.



All of these states when they arise are imperfections of our mind. We are to abandon the imperfection in every instance. Remember the ESCAPE from suffering happens by practicing the following steps:



1. **NEVERMIND** the moment you discover the imperfection, just as soon as mind's attention is pulled away from your object of meditation or forgiveness.
2. **LET GO** of your attention from the distraction.
3. **RELAX** any subtle leftover tension in the head. The body will follow without any added effort if you relax the head/mind.
4. **SMILE** to lighten mind and sharpen awareness.
5. **RETURN** mind's attention to sending Loving-Kindness to your Spiritual Friend or to your Forgiveness practice, or to your task in life.
6. **REPEAT** this cycle ONLY when mind's attention is pulled away. Practice observing HOW mind's attention always moves away by itself. You don't ask it to do that.

Your practice is meant to grow the strength of the feeling of Forgiveness, Compassion, and Loving-Kindness and allow it to illuminate outwards into everything around you. This practice only needs you to Let Go, Relax and **SMILE**. When you have a person you are forgiving, stay only with that person. *Relax, smile and keep forgiving!*

In terms of modern science, each time you practice the above steps, you are practicing a cycle identifying craving; abandoning these imperfections. Your old neural pathways are drying up because of lack of use, as you keep letting go of any personal concern. Then, each time you are smiling and bringing up Loving-Kindness, you are establishing new neural pathways in the brain. New wholesome habits take hold and become your road to escape from most daily suffering! With these new tendencies, you will begin to respond more often in life than react.

A great teacher once said "As soon as you see that a distraction is an imperfection of mind, you should abandon them and they will fall away."

No matter what kind of meditation you are practicing, the solution is to immediately abandon any distraction.

- Do not get personally involved with any distractions that come up in mind.
- Do not try to suppress any distraction.
- Understand how they work and allow them to come up, be there by themselves, and naturally pass away.
- Keep your meditation going with a **SMILE**.
- Whenever you abandon an imperfection, you must replace it by returning to a wholesome mind-state to continue purifying and retraining mind.

It is the knowledge of HOW these distractions work that sets us free of them. We gently release them and allow them to fade away in their own time without giving them any more nutriment or food in the form of our personal attention. By doing this, with patience, they will become annihilated without struggle or force.

***Keep your meditation going
as long as you can with a **SMILE**.***

***May you attain a swift and clear mind,
free from suffering in this very lifetime!***



AUTHOR'S BIO



Sasana Dipika Ven. Khanti Khema, is an American Buddhist nun ordained in 2006 by His Holiness, Most Ven. Bhante Vimalaramsi Mahathero. She is the Co-Founder of United International Buddha Dhamma Society (UIBDS) & Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (DSMC) in Annapolis, Missouri, USA. For the past 21 years, she has lived a life fully committed to spreading Buddha Dhamma through practice, research and preservation of a purely Sutta-based understanding of the Buddha's teachings. Following in the footsteps of

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~ Sharing Teaching ~

*May suffering ones be suffering free
And the fear-struck fearless be.
May the grieving shed all grief,
And may all beings find relief.
May all beings share this teaching
that we have thus acquired
for the acquisition of all kinds of Happiness.
May beings inhabiting Space and Earth,
Guardians and Teachers of Mighty Power,
Share this teaching of ours.*

*May they long preserve
this protective teaching for all Humanity.*